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When Adaptation Eludes Transformation

The Losing Game of Portuguese Territories within the Context of Europe

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portugaises dans le contexte européen*

*Quando adaptação não rima com transformação. O jogo de ilusões dos territórios
portugueses no contexto europeu*

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WHEN ADAPTATION ELUDES TRANSFORMATION

The Losing Game of Portuguese Territories within the Context of Europe

What may be the expected effects of European integration on Portuguese regions, referring to the role of Community funding in public sub-national activity? The inclusion of Portuguese local and regional entities within the European context opens up new opportunities in a new administrative environment. This should influence the socio-political practices under which they usually operate. Significant consequences are also to be expected in the way they act, especially bearing in mind that Portugal is one of the countries that has benefited most from European regional policy. To what extent this has led to a modernization of the Portuguese political system, considering specifically the principles of transparency, subsidiarity and participation which are promoted by European discourse? These should lead to an enhanced role of territorial forces in the decision-making processes.

Quand l'adaptation élude la transformation.

Le jeu perdant des régions portugaises dans le contexte européen

Quels impacts peut-on attendre de la construction européenne dans les régions portugaises, notamment en ce qui concerne le rôle des fonds communautaires dans l'activité politique subnationale? L'insertion d'acteurs territoriaux portugais dans le contexte européen les met en contact avec de nouvelles opportunités et référentiels de gouvernance, qui ont des répercussions dans leurs pratiques socio-politiques habituelles. On peut donc s'attendre à des effets non négligeables dans leur manière d'agir, surtout si l'on tient compte du fait que le Portugal est un des pays européens les plus fortement marqués par la politique régionale communautaire. Dans quelle mesure cette circonstance mène-t-elle le système politique portugais à se moderniser, selon les règles de transparence, subsidiarité et participation promues par les normes européennes, notamment en ce qui concerne le respect du rôle des forces territoriales dans les processus de décision?

Quando adaptação não rima com transformação.

O jogo de ilusões dos territórios portugueses no contexto europeu

Quais os impactos esperáveis da construção europeia nas regiões portuguesas, tendo em conta, nomeadamente, o papel dos fundos comunitários na actividade política sub-nacional? A inserção das figuras territoriais portuguesas no contexto europeu mete-as em contacto com novas oportunidades e referenciais governativos, os quais deverão repercutir-se nas suas práticas socio-políticas habituais. Reflexos importantes serão pois de prever na sua actuação. Sobretudo, se se tiver em mente que Portugal é um dos países fortemente tocados pela política regional comunitária. Discute-se aqui em que medida essa circunstância levou o sistema político português a modernizar-se, seguindo as regras de transparência, subsidiariedade e participação promovidas pela norma europeia, mormente no que diz respeito ao papel das forças territoriais nos seus processos de decisão.

The reinforcement of decentralised authorities is one of the banners of the European Union. Hooghe & Marks (1996: 207) even state that “the diversification and intensification of political activity at a subnational level are the most important features of European integration”. This means that the variety of resources, the institutional learning and the guiding principles of the European Union – “*une nouvelle vision du monde référée à l'action publique locale*” (Négrier 1995: 45) – exert a strong influence over the conduct of the subnational authorities. In this way, the construction of Europe will consolidate the importance that the various territorial arenas, institutions and leaders had already acquired in the recomposition of political life across Europe¹.

Several factors explain the devolution of power into the hands of subnational entities. Firstly, the pressure for greater efficiency in public affairs, because central mechanisms of regulation are considered slow, distant and excessively bureaucratic. Secondly, the phenomena of deregulation, privatisation and increasing social complexity, which requires flexible responses involving various government bodies and social groups. Finally, the methodology associated with the European programmes, aimed at encouraging the cooperation between different levels of power and stimulating local authorities to take on a stronger leading role. This has been called ‘multi-level governance’.

‘Proximity’ becomes the common issue for procedures addressing the modernization of politics and the revitalisation of the public sphere. On the one hand, ‘proximity’ refers to the contexts where mediations necessary for the success of public policies are considered to reside. The aim is to reinstate effective government, reconcile citizens with their representatives, fight exclusion and strengthen collective identities from below. In addition, proximity meets the demands of the European Union, intellectually mobilised behind principles such as subsidiarity and participation, placed at the operational core of its programmes².

To understand these developments and their underlying assumptions, one of the concepts most frequently employed is that of ‘governance’. It is clear that governance has not yet acquired the theoretical stability necessary to achieve a universal definition. Being the “structured ways and means in which the divergent preferences of interdependent actors are translated into policy choices “to allocate ‘values’, so that the plurality of interests is transformed into co-ordinated action and the compliance of actores is achieved” (Eising & Kolher-Koch 1999: 5), it may encompass several modes and patterns of political action. However, the concept of governance always refers to the decentring of the state in the majority of today’s decision-making process. This implies a significant reconfiguration of political arenas, which has already been named a *repeuplement* (Massardier 2003). In governance

¹ Extending the changes that had already placed decentralization at the centre of national agendas.

² The politics of local development, for example, are part of “*une recherche plus globale de modèles de développement susceptibles de mobiliser le plus grand nombre possible d’individus*” (LAVIGNOTTE-GUÉRIN 1999: 10). A significant amount of European funding was therefore based on the assumption of “*servir à la mise en place de mesures qui assurent la participation démocratique et l’implication des citoyens. Pour la Commission, les actions régionales manquent en effet d’efficacité si elles ne s’accompagnent pas d’une mobilisation de l’ensemble des acteurs (publics et privés) au niveau local*” (*ibid.*: 11).

theories, public action is viewed as the result of the increasing interdependence of networks of actors, both public and private and central and local, who are essentially linked by contractual practices (Le Galès & Thatcher 1995, Gaudin 1999). Power is seen as disseminated across many spheres, both sectoral and territorial, in which it is used strategically, as a way of structuring the multiple negotiations that precede and accompany any form of institutional action³.

Governance and the Consecration of Actors by 'Europe'

Notions of networking and governance have been widely applied to the process of the territorialisation of public policies. The renewal of interest in territory and its actors has arisen because the state, under the changes of decentralization and Europe, has lost its prerogative as the exclusive locus of power, being intersected by multiple circles of authority, particularly those of a territorial nature. Equally, analyses increasingly report modes of political and economic regulation based on territory, following an urban or regional logic. Given the European tendency for the withdrawal – or recomposition (Wright & Cassese 1996) – of the state in the face of market forces and social complexity, it is being accepted that intermediate territories, such as cities and regions, could provide an effective level for socio-political integration, organization and regulation (Le Galès 2003). This means that groups, organizations and interests of an eminently territorial nature may take shape and, in the most advanced cases, will be able to define their own strategies in the light of external representation, namely through the European Union (Jeffery 1997).

It should, however, be noted that the probability of these governance practices applying to genuine collective territorial actors (Agnew 1987, Le Galès 2003) varies according to circumstances in each area. The type of economic development, the traditions of civic cooperation (Putnam's 'social capital'), national political cultures etc., play an important role.

Another concept useful for territorial approaches should be mentioned: that of 'political exchange'. The use of the 'political exchange' tool is particularly relevant when studying the links that subnational territories forge with the processes related to European integration. The exchanges promoted by Communitarian policies between representatives of the European bodies and local entities reveal, for instance, the phenomena of cooperation and reciprocal legitimacy between actors related to different spheres and institutional logics, working together at levels ranging from the local to the supranational. The pattern is usually that of the translation of European concepts into the local universes (Négrier 1995).

Territorialized political exchanges may, however, differ from one region to another. This happens because not all regions are prepared to become forums for European policies. Many are incapable of reconciling

“les intérêts selon une logique à la fois verticale (entre différents niveaux) et horizontale de représentation des intérêts privés et publics, [débouchant sur] un compromis territorialisé qui repose sur la

³ From local authorities to Community institutions, negotiation is the most salient feature of contemporary working practices.

régulation des interactions entre différents réseaux (fonctionnaires européens et nationaux, déconcentrés ou non, experts, agents de développement, scientifiques, représentants professionnels, corps techniques, etc.).”

In conclusion,

“la capacité régionale à ‘capturer’ l’échange politique, à incarner un forum des politiques européennes, est liée à la nature des médiations qui se construisent à leur occasion, ainsi qu’à un ensemble de phénomènes qui relèvent davantage des caractéristiques nationales. (Négrier 1995: 50-52)”

For this reason, regions may simply be arenas, rather than forums, for territorial politics. In many situations, the regional level is just *“un espace d’échanges politiques parmi d’autres, sans capacité supérieure de coordination et de négociation entre intérêts territoriaux”* (Négrier 1999: 123). In this case, the fragmentary nature of the networks involved in European policies, reproducing institutional and political cleavages or infra-regional clashes, leads to a situation in which *“le rôle officiel de programmation régionale [soit] en réalité celui d’un espace secondaire, une chambre d’enregistrement de compromis construits ailleurs”* (p. 124). No ‘regional interest’ emerges able to defuse conflicts between subregional interests, networks or institutions. The opposing political cultures, public and private interests, economic and social perspective, etc. are given free expression.

This happens because, amongst other factors, the functioning of the European Union (EU) does not impose effective multi-level governance as a typically ‘European’ form of administration. Regions and other territories often resent the fact that their role as representative intermediaries has not been sufficiently well-established. Europeanization, as the gradual diffusion-penetration of values, norms and decisions from European to domestic institutions, is still a long way from creating a new constitutional situation within member states of the Union (Kohler-Koch 1998: 53). The requirement for territorial actors to be privileged intermediaries in public policies (particularly in projects financed by European funding) has to be evaluated in the light of contextual circumstances⁴.

At best, the guiding principles, practices and rules promoted by the European Community constitute an ‘offer’ related to the transfer of funds, representing a proposed means for territorial agents to deal with the Commission and also recommended economic and political concepts and strategies to improve development in their area – “a window of opportunity, an offer which, in each individual case may, or may not match the demand of individual actors” (Kohler-Koch 1998: 41).

The European Union has consequently allowed its principles and means of intervention to be shaped by national political/administrative cultures. Globally the impact of Community policies on territories may be considered on the basis of three distinct scenarios (Balme & Jouve 1996). Firstly, the consolidation of traditional policy networks, linked to state bureaucracies, reinforcing their territorial position through their role as European policy interlocutors; secondly, the

⁴ The Commission normally avoids interfering in the networks that organize public policies at the national level, as a way of preventing mistrust amongst Member States. In addition, outside the domain of structural funding, “the Commission shows little interest in the regions and works more closely with national governments. In general terms, the Commission needs states and it is more interested in political efficiency than in efficient measure to address the broader issues of political restructuring” (KEATING & PINTARITS 1998: 41).

superimposition of new policy networks, emerging from access to the European system. This, however, may not necessarily imply a reorganization of the political system and a change in the structural conditions under which territories operate; finally, the substitution scenario, referring to the creation of new policy networks and leading to a reinvention of the political system.

The Portuguese Case

The Portuguese case may be analysed in the light of these hypotheses. As one of the countries that has most benefited from European regional policy, one should expect that its adaptation to Community procedures through regional funding would have a significant impact, particularly considering that when it joined the European Economic Community in 1986, Portugal was still one of the most centralised countries in Europe. Significant changes were envisaged due to the contact with the methods and style of government encouraged by Brussels, for example, concerning the way territorial representation proposed by Europe would be absorbed into the political system, structured upon more traditional, party-political and functional forms of mediation. These expectations were in line with appeals for subsidiarity and the participation of regional entities in implementing Community projects.

However, it is important to remember that Portugal's entry into the European project occurred parallel to its democratic transition. This was a decisive factor because the reconstruction of the country according to democratic criteria – associated with the territorial penetration of political parties and the revitalisation of local powers, creating a new framework for centre-periphery transactions – merited absolute priority. Europe would provide, at best, an 'external' impetus for the political and economic modernization of the country.

Unfinished decentralization, Europeanization 'on the doorstep'

The objectives of decentralization played an important part in the political/institutional movement following the 1974 Revolution. An ambitious decentralization programme was inscribed in the 1976 Constitution. Besides the creation of the autonomous regions of the Madeira and Azores islands, formalised in 1979, it also included the transfer of competences and autonomy (which did not exist during the dictatorship) to the municipalities, viewed as the natural basis for the democratic learning of citizens and the objectives of the country's infrastructural development. This took place in a Portugal that was, in general, impoverished and facing a serious economic crisis.

A project to create administrative regions in continental Portugal was also included in the Constitution. Inspired by the territorial reforms that countries such as France and Italy were developing at the time, the implementation of regions, rather than districts, as regional *autarquias* (local government) was to be "the main constitutional innovation in terms of local government structure" (Canotilho & Moreira 1993: 254). Decentralization, it was said, "is another name for freedom".

The fate of the regions is crucial. It confronts some of the most fundamental assumptions about Europeanization with their effective counterpart within national systems. In the case of Portugal, this is particularly true, since the troubled path

of regionalization, which was finally voted down⁵, illuminates some of the most striking factors that explain the failure of the political system to converge with the values and methods associated to European governance. As regional politics represents a vehicle for the modes of government promoted by the European Community, the regional scenarios constitute a privileged laboratory in which 'Europeanization' can be tested. As Faure recalls (2000: 35), in terms of comparative European politics, various studies have shown that "*les scènes infranationales dans lesquelles se développent de nouveaux compromis sociaux possèdent un centre de gravité régional assez structurant*".

Regionalization or the Experience that Never Came

In Portugal after the Revolution the regions benefited from the same support as the 'classic' municipalities and parishes⁶. Together they were supposed to bring administration closer to the citizens, ensuring effective representation for the different territorial levels envisaged: local, regional and national. Ignoring, at this point, the problem of the regional map to be defined⁷, the regions were to be strengthened by their legitimacy throughout Europe, corresponding to values of transparency, democracy, political participation, efficiency and socio-economic equity. It was argued that regionalization was "necessary to improve democracy", although its material objective was to facilitate economic progress in the different national regions. It should be noted that we are referring to a functional rather than a political form of regionalization (Quermonne 1963). It was a project inspired by the precepts of economic planning and regional economics in vogue, rather than the fulfilment of any form of political regionalism. In fact, traces of regionalism can only be seen in the Azores, which is not surprising if we consider the absence of traditions of true regional forces or feelings in Portugal (where not even feudalism existed).

Despite this, multiple blockages and contradictions began to undermine the process of regionalization. A series of impediments was constructed over the years, all contributing to confining regions to the limbo of constitutional symbolism. That regionalization was not a self-fulfilling constitutional prophecy is the least we can say. In reality, any approach to regionalization means grasping the pragmatic reasons for its abandonment, paradoxically accepted by the political forces without visible trouble.

⁵ With the 'no' vote triumphing in the referendum held in November 1998.

⁶ Although this soon vanished. The municipalities and parishes became the only genuinely accepted structures. The principles of regionalization were still legitimate but the practices were subverted.

⁷ Regionalization was supposed to appropriate the regional map of deconcentrated state services (the four Commissions for Regional Development of the time – North, Central, Lisbon and South) created in the sixties for the purposes of regional planning, which basically corresponded to the areas covered by the present-day Commissions for Regional Coordination and Development. The aim was to give them the status of local authorities, that is, to make them elected bodies, with their own competences and administrative and financial autonomy. It should be noted that a certain technocracy already functioning in the CCRs, experienced in working with universities and local agents, was to prove important in bringing the regions into the Constitution.

In fact, the regions did not gather the necessary political, social and institutional allegiances to impose themselves within the administrative corpus of the country. This means we are facing a state which has failed to meet its commitment to the Constitution and a collection of political parties who have ignored their own manifestos, considering that all parties had included regionalization in their agendas and regions had never created any ideological divisions or doctrinal incompatibility amongst them. Although there were eventual disagreements over the regional map, all the political parties had publicly affirmed their dedication to its implementation. In the end, however, it came to represent something to invest in when in opposition or during election periods. Once in power, regionalization proved itself to be 'dispensable'.

The rhetoric of regionalization, prolific over the years, finally ended up serving only the ambitions of individuals and groups aiming for a better position within the existing system. In other words, it served actors looking for more advantageous positions within the state apparatus, which they had really never wanted to transform and whose functioning was based on a political culture where regions appeared to be dispensable or even dangerous. As Barreto summarises (1998: 22-23),

"the more fragile or unstable powers sought in regionalization a means of enlarging their support base, whilst the established or longer-lasting powers ignored it. The result was a kind of dead-end street: regionalization, given its importance, needs a strong power behind it, which, being strong already, has no interest in it."

In terms of public scrutiny, it was only when the referendum approached (November 1998), that regionalization broke out of its narrow political confines. Even though at the beginning of the 1980s, together with the *Livro Branco sobre Regionalização* ("White Paper on Regionalization", published by the *Aliança Democrática* government, a centre-right coalition), the issue had been debated passionately, this enthusiasm was short-lived. When the socialist Mário Soares became Prime Minister in 1983, the project was abandoned and only taken up again in the latter half of the 1990s by António Guterres, surprisingly another socialist. At the time, however, regionalisation had become embroiled in political confusion. For some people, following the argument of the previous Prime Minister, Cavaco Silva (PSD, *Partido Social-democrata*, Social Democratic Party, centre-right), the project would increase bureaucracy and state spending, prejudice the municipalities and damage national integrity by setting regions against each other. Equally it would introduce regional *caciquismo* and territorial egoism. For others, it would be completely the opposite. Once again, the expectations of those politically involved in the discussion were focused on various different goals, amongst which regions were eventually absent.

Typically, regionalisation fades within the political system, its main issues being instrumentalised by the dominant controversies, actors and coalitions of the moment. Forced into a cyclical existence, according to how useful it appeared to party tactics or election gains, it ultimately fell into ambiguity and impasse proving that regions did not represent a form of territorial organization that the state might be interested in promoting or increasing. In almost thirty years of debating and building democracy, regions have remained a constitutional 'no-man's land' (Keating 1996: 9).

Regionalization is conspicuous by its absence in many plans. As far as political democratisation is concerned, the main purpose of the political parties always

involves their presence at the heart of the state apparatus, rather than any interest in decentralization. Some aspects of regionalization would even have seemed dangerous, given the weak territorial penetration of party organizations and new political powers. As Pellegrino recalled (*et al.* 1986: 121):

“Ces dix dernières années, on peut situer les grandes causes du blocage du processus de régionalisation, non seulement dans l’incapacité réelle du pouvoir central à découper l’espace (problèmes de délimitation des régions administratives, de déconcentration de fonctions, de décentralisation de compétences), mais aussi dans l’instabilité et la fragilité du pouvoir politique dans le cadre du nouveau régime démocratique. Cela a eu pour conséquence une primauté donnée par les partis politiques aux formes de “centralisme plutôt qu’à celles de pouvoirs locaux ou régionaux centrifuges”, dans la mesure où une régionalisation aurait pu signifier l’affaiblissement des forces politiques instituées; forces pour lesquelles des espaces bien délimités constituent des supports nécessaires. Multiplier les niveaux de représentation est apparu désormais non seulement comme un affaiblissement du pouvoir central, mais aussi comme une menace pour les partis politiques implantés; les forces politiques ont encore accentué dans les faits l’action traditionnelle de frein du pouvoir central, menant ainsi à un blocage du processus de régionalisation.”

In addition, it was assumed that regionalization would place one third of national territory (the Alentejo region in the south) in the hands of the Communist Party, a circumstance that imposed a kind of implicit veto on the project.

Moreover, if state efficiency implied increased decentralization via the regions, this was not reflected in the models of action favoured by the actors within the system – in particular those most active in the renewed centre-periphery channels – regarding their personal trajectories and influence. Given the absence of genuine regional interests and all the political parties’ dedication to gains within the central state apparatus, regionalization did not durably serve the interests of any particular elite whose political prospects depended on regional institutions. Hence the difficulty in perceiving the advantages of regions for individual careers, as well as the reason why few actors within the parties appeared likely to become future regional leaders. Divided between the local ‘people’ and the national leading figures, the political parties made regionalization a matter of internal adjustments, a personal issue important only to a minority who, once the party was back in power (following the alternating PSD/PS cycle), could always be managed.

The postponement of regional institutions therefore means that regional issues were not really considered worthwhile. Having no intermediary platform to consider, strategies, negotiations and coalitions of actors are constituted either in relation to local arenas or national configurations.

Several mayors and directors of the Coordination Commissions provide good examples of this, in particular in the Algarve and Northern regions, or the city of Porto, traditional bastions of regional voices. Although defending regional institutions, they almost invariably abandoned them when their careers reached central administration, repressing the impulse towards regionalization. When the actors appointed to ministerial posts are those who have made successful careers in the cities or regional administrations (CCRs), the territorial ‘lifeblood’ is drained away, as a consequence of the departure of elites that would have been well placed to assume regional leadership.

The 'Sanctity' of Local Powers

Tradition legitimised this situation. In the oldest and most homogeneous nation state in Europe⁸, two sole major historical continuities can be identified, the central and the municipal. Not surprisingly, local powers have absorbed most of the decentralization impetus in the democratic period, in such a way that the features of this rebirth of the local – characterised by highly personalised forms of government (Grémion 1976, Ruivo 2000) and longstanding client relationships, parallel to huge competition between the municipalities for access to the state administration – become one of the main obstacles for the regions and the viability of more efficient forms of territorial organization. As Reis noted (2004a), one of the consequences of 'municipal constitutionalism' has been the 'poverty of territory' in Portugal. Local powers have always been hostile to regional power:

"Local power is a-regional and anti-regional. There is no solidarity between these restricted areas [...] the leading municipal groups [...] are totally independent of each other, whilst dominating in their own limited areas. And from area to area there are balances of power, since there has never been anyone powerful enough to break up the social structure to their own advantage. Such an attempt to alter the current situation would subordinate one oligarchy to another – through the creation of capitals – and no one has been prepared to make such a sacrifice." (Magalhães & Coelho 1986: 35)

Dominated by atomistic orientations, displaying a poor history of working together and with no notion of a shared destiny, regional spaces have become mosaics of competing localisms. Local political values and orientations permanently reproduce the effects of fragmentation and inter-municipal competitiveness that explain the weakness of regional ambitions and are, moreover, used by the state to consolidate its own centrality, disregarding visions of more advanced forms of territorial organization. Such a situation is coherent with the dominant paradigm of local power, whose inspiration is that of the Napoleonic 'local administration' (dependent on the centre) rather than one of true autonomy of 'local government' (Mabileau *et al.* 1987: 13).

It should also be noted that that Portuguese society is based on strong socio-territorial segmentation (Medeiros 1988) and is extremely polymorphic. Attempts to preserve individual history, "their relative autonomy as a cultural identity and a form of social organization", correspond to each spatial unit, meaning that inter-regional or metropolitan ties may confront deep-rooted "principles of exclusion and opposition" (*Ibid.*: 151, 153). Socio-territorial differences are frequently superimposed onto cooperative or associative ventures for example, making inter-municipal association difficult.

Moreover, the hypertrophy of personalised power that defines local leadership is heightened by, amongst other reasons, the fact that the democratic reconstruction

⁸ Portugal is the oldest and most stable formation on the European political map. In Rokkan's typology it is the only European state formed in the Middle Ages which does not display any socio-cultural 'particularities' within its borders and is unified both in terms of institutional structure and the level of ethno-linguistic homogeneity. The only comparable case in Europe, in terms of the absence of ethnic minorities, is Iceland, formed in the 20th century (ROKKAN & URWIN 1987: 89).

of local power has been marked by a serious state financial crisis. The state under decentralization is also a state in fiscal crisis, in which financial restrictions seriously affect the exercise of local government obligations, making Portugal the country with the lowest percentage of public spending administered by local government in Europe – not even 10% of the total. In addition, the funding for municipal budgets comes mainly from the State budget via the Financial Equilibrium Fund (FEF, *Fundo de Equilíbrio Financeiro*).

In these circumstances, local politicians seek to overcome their difficulties by using special contacts with different departments and actors in the state administration. Knowing how effective informal exchanges can be, they aim to achieve through personal means that which a merely formal claim will not accomplish. Networking has become the mechanism available to the local political class to circumnavigate their hierarchical relationship with the centre and the inadequacies of the bureaucratic framework, as well as the financial reasons often invoked by the state for restricting their resources – “it involves networks of friendships, political networks, contacts, shared complicity in administrative levels and inside knowledge, particularly through family ties, which in our country (and in many others) has acquired incalculable importance in resolving problems at various levels of social life, particularly in terms of channelling resources to local governments and accelerating bureaucratic procedures” (Ruivo 1991: 198). The issue here is that the ability to draw on personal networking as a way of obtaining resources is something that not all mayors possess in equal measure and it can lead to disparate responses and outcomes, resulting in municipalities being very unevenly supplied with various collective facilities and assets.

Fuelling the system

On entering the European Community in 1986, the political system had already been (re)centralized, although some progress had been made in terms of decentralization. The influx of community funding did not substantially alter this but, in fact, enabled it to continue. It seemed that all the tasks involving the modernization of the country could be pursued through the relatively closed and personalised connections between local and central authorities. From this point, however, all that was needed was what Mathiot (1998: 88) has termed

“...acculturation à l'Europe, qui s'apparente moins à la constitution ou à la fabrication d'un nouveau système d'action qu'à l'incorporation au système existant de 'ce qu'il faut d'Europe' pour apparaître à Bruxelles comme un partenaire fiable et donc susceptible d'être aidé.”

In order to fulfil this and respect Community pressures to define and implement projects on a regional level, the state reinvested in its deconcentrated regional structures: the Commissions for Regional Coordination. Regional planning and the activities of the CCRs therefore witnessed “a veritable explosion” after Portugal joined the European Community (EC) (Martins 1997: 110). The ‘superministry’ of Planning and Regional Administration was created and regional development has been made autonomous within the central administration, “to ensure an interface with the EC”. Inside the CCR, the ‘Regional Council’, representing all the municipalities in a region, emerged, holding consultancy powers in relation to

projects financed by the Community. Regional planning has begun to "integrate a Community element into its operations" (*Ibid.*).

The role attributed to the five CCR (North, Centre, Lisbon and Tejo Valley, Alentejo, Algarve) regarding Community funding is important because it strengthens the only pole of regional life in the country. In fact, when people refer to regions in Portugal, they normally mean the functions and the areas covered by the Commissions for Regional Coordination. Although they are part of the (deconcentrated) state administration, the Coordination Commissions have promoted an important regional dynamic, involving local authorities. They represent a decisive technical support structure for the municipalities and are especially designated to prepare them for accessing European funding. A regional sense of action is always inherent in the technical and administrative routines of the CCRs. Despite being technocratic organizations, they are nevertheless devoted to making micro-territorial agents interiorise the Community logics of action:

"L'application des fonds structurels européens a ainsi mis clairement en évidence le rapport étroit entre la qualité du partenariat Commissions de Coordination Régionales/municipalités et les taux d'exécution de ces programmes." (Reis & Négrier 1998: 171)

The presidents of the CCRs in particular, even if chosen and supervised by the Planning and Regional Administration Minister in Lisbon, have usually ended up attempting a characteristically regional form of leadership. A certain notion of regional interest has gradually emerged through their efforts to promote cohesion amongst sub-regional areas – involving dialogue with the municipalities to encourage them to integrate their projects – and through their 'external' representation of the region. The CCRs therefore represent more than the mere technocratic exercise of deconcentrated state authority. They constitute a crucial stage in regional experiences and projects. Some of them, particularly in the north, were later to provide various governments with some of their most famous ministers, such as Valente de Oliveira of the PSD, or Elisa Ferreira and Braga da Cruz of the PS.

Although integrated into the centralist, vertical and bureaucratic state system, the way in which CCRs operate allows them to develop strategic informality in areas which extend beyond the judicial-administrative scope of the state apparatus. In this sense, they configure an embryonic regional system, introducing relational density into an organization that still lacks sufficient territorial recognition. Following the creation of the Regional-based Incentive Scheme (SIBR)⁹ as part of the Community Support Framework II (QCA II)¹⁰ managed by the CCRs, efforts to build regional partnerships have intensified.

For a better understanding of the role of the CCRs, two aspects must be considered; their internal and their 'external' action. In the latter, mediation between various Community programmes and territorial agents should be highlighted. Several opportunities for 'European socialisation' *via* cooperation projects in the EU, such as opportunities for cross-border cooperation, have been made accessible to local actors through the activities of the CCRs.

⁹ *Sistema de Incentivos de Base Regional.*

¹⁰ *Quadro Comunitário de Apoio II, 1994-1999.*

From a territorial point of view, examples of 'Europeanization' impacts, usually involving the CCRs, include closer ties with the Galician region through the "*Comunidade de Trabalho Galiza-Região Norte de Portugal*" ("Galicia-Northern Region of Portugal Working Community") and between the cities of the "*Eixo Atlântico*", at the heart of the so-called Euro-region, as well as links between both the North and Centre and Castilla e Leon, or even the Atlantic Arc¹¹ (combined with other more sectoral initiatives, related to tourism, for example). The various Interregs*, in particular, represent a remarkable form of Luso-Spanish cooperation, promoting cross-border integration where territorial actors (the municipalities, development agencies, and universities) play a leading part.

The north of the country was to become very active in this matter, recreating historical and cultural affinities suspended during the Iberian dictatorships and the democratic reconstruction of both countries. As part of the attempts to foster inter-regional dynamics and establish a Galician-Portuguese lobby in Brussels – achieved, for instance, through links between municipalities on both sides of the border, such as the *Comunidade Territorial de Cooperação do Vale do Minho* (Vale do Minho Cooperative Territorial Community) – there was an agreement between the *Xunta de Galicia* and the North CCR represented by Manuel Fraga Iribarne, the Galician regional leader, and Manuel Braga da Cruz, President of the Northern CCR. Despite an evident institutional asymmetry, reflecting the different representational status of a president of an autonomous region elected by popular vote vis-à-vis a 'technocrat' appointed by the government, this did not prevent cooperation and trust between both territories from developing.

It should be noted, however, that the effects of cooperation between Galicia and the North (or other Portuguese regions and their European counterparts) on the political, namely regional, representation of territories, entail contradictory aspects. On the one hand, it allowed supporters of the regions, especially the northern ones, to use the institutional discrepancy between Galicia and the North to demonstrate the urgent need for regional government in Portugal, emphasising the obstacles Portugal faces in not having authentic regional structures. On the other hand, it also served those who opposed the regional project. They emphasised that the efforts of the CCRs and their executives in regional leadership, both internally and externally, prove that there is no real need for an elected regional administration. Whatever the interpretation, it is clear that the emerging leadership provided by the CCRs extended beyond the strictly technocratic functions ascribed to the regional commissions and placed them at the centre of a stimulating, territorialized form of politics.

As far as CCR intra-regional activities are concerned, two major obstacles must be considered (Reis & Négrier 1998). The first involves areas dominated predominantly by one form of activity, such as tourism or industry, which have their own channels of (functional) representation, with no particular interest in a territorial approach. The second concerns the miscellany of actors and interests operating within local contexts. Due to a deficient regional structuring of the

¹¹ A federation of the coastal regions of countries such as Great Britain, France, Portugal and Spain.

* *Editor's note:* Interreg is one of the European Community Initiative Programmes.

interests, necessary to “play the partnership, as defined by Brussels”, the CCRs became responsible for a significant part of the supra-municipal coordination related to ‘European’ projects. The problem is that they have to accomplish it in what has become a highly politicised environment, provoked by the fact that initiatives benefiting from Community funding become a means of legitimising locally elected officials. This does not mask the importance of the CCRs in promoting partnerships or acting as guardians of community norms but, in fact, consolidates local systems as the major frames of reference for Community policies. Simultaneously, the reciprocal legitimization of state actors and local elites through other projects, many also Community-funded, has reinforced the existing centre-periphery system. Even if the CCRs, who manage around 20% of the structural funds, have introduced a certain regional methodology, this has not substantially changed the existing system of territorial representation.

Notwithstanding the fact that the CCRs favour territorial dynamics, being close to local forces and sharing the values underpinning their activities, the reality is that local powers are too heterogeneous and fragmented, expressing a sense of disaffection simultaneously vis-à-vis Community norms and the fate of the regions, all of which makes regional planning difficult. In the words of a former President of the CCR Centro:

“If we ask the overwhelming majority of political officials in the region what the CSF III Centre Region objectives and strategies are, I would be very happy if just a small percentage of them could answer the question clearly. I am sure that the vast majority would not know what to say, because they have not been involved in the planning.”¹²

Sub-regional competition, developed between rival cities, has worsened the scenario:

“What must not happen is a situation where people are going around saying that the Viseu objectives have got nothing to do with the Coimbra ones, or the Leiria ones have nothing to do with those of Aveiro. If that continues to happen we will never be a politically valid region.”

The modernization of the administration

The process of modernizing the administration, which territorial authorities were supposed to undertake in order to deal with European projects, is related to the difficulties in renewing territorial representation. It is known that the possibility of the local authorities seeing their territories included in cohesion and development policies will depend, to a great extent, on the human and technical investments they make in order to attract these policies (Marks *et al.* 1996, Benington 1994). The complexity of Community programmes, requiring specialized knowledge in very different areas, added to the fact that European legislation is constantly evolving, makes the issue of local government modernization and organizational restructuring a crucial indicator of its involvement in community policies.

Conscious of the weak indicators concerning local government technical and human resources, in a recent study (Ruivo & Francisco 2003) we questioned local

¹² Interview at the CCRC, April 2004.

officials about the organizational changes they implemented in order to adapt most efficiently to the opportunities offered by the EU.

Three types of investment were considered: human resources, technological modernization and the creation of an office dedicated to deal with Community programmes. The overwhelming majority of the municipalities – 75.2% – said that they had introduced changes when structural funding arrived, 18.3% responded that they had not introduced anything new into their functioning.

In general, however, the results reveal a limited local government restructuring in relation to 'Europe'. The modernization of services merely meant computerising existing services and had little to do with innovations in administrative practices, in particular those meaning a greater openness and transparency in decision-making. Greater administrative efficiency was sought within traditional cognitive frameworks – the personification of power in the figure of the mayor (so-called local *Cesarism*) and a functional dependency in relation to the state, accentuated throughout access to European funding.

A closer analysis led us to further conclusions. The material difficulties many local officials claimed as the explanation for inadequate modernization following Community requirements revealed, on a deeper level, a poor awareness of Europe and its underlying principles¹³. This reinforces the tendency to engender scepticism regarding the cost/benefit relationship of the 'European' option. The lack of local government staff, an alleged explanation for the difficulties in dealing with 'European' projects must be seen in the light of their overall disinterest in European matters.

In fact, although municipal officials may address the state administration for elucidation and technical support regarding Community funding, a general lack of information required for decision-making can still be noticed. Even allowing for recent developments in human resources, the organizational gap between central and local administration has widened, given the successive transfer of competences to local entities and the complexity of bureaucratic procedures introduced by Europe. European integration therefore resurrects the spectre of the *grau zero do poder local* (Mozzicafreddo & Guerra 1988).

As far as local authorities are concerned, the feeling of belonging and being part of Europe – strong, according to our research – is not accompanied by an equivalent experience of the principles and styles of government associated with European practices. This happens, amongst other factors, because the encounter between Brussels policies – such as regional development – and the territories is invariably mediated by state officials, as unsurpassable figures in European programmes. The chance for Europe to encourage forms of territorial governance, where arrangements of public and private actors emerge associated with identity and cohesion within a territorial system, able to perform coherent external strategies, is therefore remote. In countries with a strong centralist tradition, such as Portugal, the prospective for local or regional interests continues to fundamentally depend on the type of relationship maintained with the state, since it holds the basic financial, bureaucratic and technical competences to execute public policies.

¹³ Confusion or a basic lack of knowledge concerning the meaning of the subsidiarity and partnership principles was widespread amongst the local officials we interviewed.

The Portuguese case reveals undoubtedly that the modernising of infrastructures unleashed by European integration has strengthened the role of the state (Reis 2004b). All issues attached to European policies (transport and mobility infrastructures, science and technology programmes, competition policies and even more clearly, economic and social cohesion policies, articulated to regional and urban development) were centralised in the state. This fact made European integration a highly political and institutional matter. Civil society, once again, revealed its extreme dependency on interaction settings created by central government.

The low investment of non-state actors in representation strategies focused on Brussels is therefore not surprising. Europe has actually functioned more as an inhibiting arena for Portuguese subnational authorities and organizations, which are too sensitive of their political and institutional weaknesses in terms of their capacity to influence the distribution of benefits in Europe. A more active involvement in the European project seems unlikely, confirming the passive and sceptical attitude that makes learning about Europe difficult. As Goldsmith & Klausen stressed (1997: 239, 240),

“such local governments lack even the elementary internal coordination necessary to deal with the EU and its vast outpourings of matters relevant to local government [...] Local politicians are likely to view the EU and its bureaucracy with suspicion and refuse to deal with them at any level above that which is required by law. They may regard other municipalities in the same way and thus refuse to cooperate with them [...] This blinkered outlook also inhibits both the politicians and paid officials from learning about the EU and adapting their behaviour accordingly [...] both politicians and officers take a view either that there is little in Europe for them, that they are too small to deal with Europe, or that they had better wait and see what happens before doing anything [...] The process by which these local governments are adapting and adjusting to European integration is thus extremely incremental.”

The parameters suggested by Europe are therefore mainly assumed, by social and territorial elites, amidst passive attitudes, which confirm longstanding practices of a certain obscurity in our relations with Europe

“we are in the European project but we are still not part of the European project [...] In the case of structural and cohesion funds, we have let them become victims of pervasive corruption, burying them in cement and concrete rather than putting them to the service of an educational and scientific-technological turnaround that would enable us to assume the European project as if it truly belonged to us. Therefore, we are in it, but from the outside, more like visitors than hosts.” (Santos 2003: 40)

The Persistent Path of Territorial Disparities

In a subtle way we have witnessed in recent years a questioning of the role played by structural funds in Portuguese development. This is still simply a matter of isolated opinions, emerging sporadically through the media or in specialist debates. Whilst not challenging the prevailing opinion, crediting European funding as the major impulse behind progress in recent decades, they express, nevertheless, discomfort with the signs of mitigated success, if not failure, in the application of Community funding. This is particularly true if we bear in mind the successful cases of Ireland and Spain under similar circumstances. Comparisons have even

been made between European funding and the gold from Brazil in the 18th century, whose damaging effects on the country's modernization are well-known. How can such a singular appraisal of European support be explained?

Community funds were expected to stimulate the development of the country as a whole. However, one of the requisites of their allocation involved combating territorial disparities, namely within the regional framework proposed in Brussels for cohesion and ERDF funding¹⁴. The trend of the Portuguese economy towards 'littoralisation' and 'metropolisation', in a country that concentrates its wealth along a narrow strip of coastal land and in the Lisbon area, leaving the interior deserted, was to be corrected and, if possible reversed, via the application of these funds.

Twenty years later the asymmetries between regions in Portugal have intensified. The sharpest contrast is represented by the disparities between Lisbon and the Tejo Valley and other Portuguese regions. The fact that numerous investments in modernization projects (particularly associated with the 1998 Universal Exhibition) have been channelled into the capital, either through Community programmes or through specific central administration funding, has increased this discrepancy.

The idea was to install the more dynamic sectors of Portuguese economy in Lisbon, so that they could operate from the capital as the driving force for modernising the whole country – a 'diffusionist' model that has not produced the expected results. One of the recent outcomes, after Lisbon and the Tejo Valley achieved a GDP per capita of 75% of the Community average¹⁵, was the decision to integrate the municipalities of Lezíria and Médio Tejo (corresponding to 80% of the region's area and 25% of its population, but displaying development indicators far below that of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area and therefore unable to access Community funds because they were situated in the same region as Lisbon), into the Alentejo and Central regions.

The demographic and economic disparities in Portugal must be related to the almost exclusive logic of party-based political representation, paralleled by forms of economic representation weakly autonomous in relation to the state. Reserving no place for territorial, namely regional, forms of intervention¹⁶, the centre-periphery system in Portugal continues to be essentially restricted to state/municipality exchanges. Divided between central administrations that Europe has made more powerful, and fragmented municipalities, whose forceful demands often led to the scattering of investments that should have served regional structuring, the model of governance in Portugal is essentially 'statist' (Eising & Kohler-Koch 1999). The mere episodic and state-controlled activation of local powers' participation in decision-making obstructs any effective pattern of horizontal governance, federating functional and territorial actors. Moreover, this scheme tends to reproduce traditional forms of inequality, arbitrariness and opacity. Remaining closed to a more 'territorialized'

¹⁴ ERDF, European Regional Development Fund. The five planning regions corresponding to the CCR areas (North, Central, Lisbon and Tejo Valley, Alentejo and Algarve), all classified as NUT II (NUT or NUTS, Nomenclature of Territorial Units [for Statistics]).

¹⁵ Removing it from the Objective 1 regions and correspondent funding.

¹⁶ REIS & Négrier (1998) denounce a situation in which the hypertrophy of the party-political logic has blocked the formation of a territorial culture.

and participatory model of development, this configuration often disguises its inadequacies and contradictions with financial contributions from Europe.

From the point of view of inter-regional equity, one of our interviewees postulated very clearly:

“Most of the economic development that takes place in the European Union is done nowadays through the regions. Since we do not have regions, the whole country has been chosen for ERDF purposes. And since the regions do not legally exist, something remarkable has happened in Portugal: the most developed region, Lisbon and the Tejo Valley, is the one that has benefited most from the European Community. The regions that need the funding most, and who, if they had their own voice, not just in Lisbon but also in Brussels, could legitimately claim it, are the ones that suffer [...]. What happens because we don't have regions? The government of the Republic, the state, has for the most part become the regional government of Lisbon. The majority of what should be Lisbon and Tejo Valley, or Lisbon Metropolitan Area, competences are state competences. And they monopolise the resources, in the name of the state, for the Lisbon region.”

Certainly, something of a reorganization in the central administration has occurred in order to adapt to managing Community programmes at a regional level. However, apart from representing a small amount of the CSF, regional programmes acquired essentially a local significance. In general, the tendency has been towards “greater centralisation of the responsibilities in the central administration, when regional politics actually needed the exact opposite” (Martins 1997: 119).

In addition, this overall framework does not hide more widespread inequalities at the heart of the centre-periphery arrangement. This is the case, for example, because

“criteria for the distribution of funds respect the disparities of the ex-FEF. Or, in other words, municipalities already receiving more from the central administration will also receive more from Brussels. On the other hand, the projects also respect the local perspective. Since all local officials have to show their involvement in projects, the complaints all revolve around the old issue of money.”¹⁷

* * *

In conclusion, the absence of a regionalization process and inadequate decentralization led to the paradox of Central Administration being the only existing space for regional socialisation. Furthermore, adding to the strict dependence of the territories on the Centre, the discontinuity and ‘chaos’ (Moreira 2005) characterising territorial circumscriptions of the public administration must be emphasised. The dramatic disjunction between different levels and sectoral spheres of the state has blocked any concerted form of territorial action. Territories have the most disparate institutional configurations, leading to disconnected actions and strategies, rather than the building of an integrated regional (and national) space.

Finally, rather than meaning greater participation for social/territorial interests in decision-making, the territorial implementation of policies such as the Community regional policy merely proves that any appeal for social or local forces to participate in these processes conforms to their dependent status towards the national authorities

¹⁷ RODRIGUES 1999: 59.

(a persistent 'path dependency'). Equally, it permits the continuity of a pattern of interaction dominated by the figure of the local 'power broker', namely the mayor, who monopolises communications with the 'outside' and makes external 'gains' (such as Community funding) the evidence of his political and personal merit.

This illustrates the persistence of a 'classic' political exchange system, based on the premise of 'gains for all', even if not equally, on an unrestricted environment where a belief in the logic of reciprocity dominates. The emergence of collective territorial actors playing an active role in Community affairs becomes an unlikely prospect. Acting as the only valid figure between European Commission and the territories and serving as a 'gatekeeper' for Community financing and opportunities, the state administrations impose significant limitations on local powers, particularly in terms of access to European bodies and their power to distribute funds. From this perspective, the Europeanization of Portuguese policy-making represents, at best, a 'minimal Europeanization' (Getimis & Paraskevopoulos 2002).

Obviously, 'European socialisation' of territorial agents and their involvement in transnational cooperation, promoted by CCRs, must not be neglected. Once again, it does not introduce significant changes either in the forms of territorial representation or modernization in subnational administrations. On the contrary, following entry into the EU, there has been a clear recentring of the state and increased opacity within the political system. This happens because,

"in Portugal the European institutions – which are relatively opaque and insufficiently representative – do not encounter a strong parliament, active regional states, parties with long traditions, or solid civic institutions as they do in Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and other countries. In Portugal those institutions encounter a weak civil society and a secretive state that is relatively inaccessible to citizens." (Barreto 1999: 114)

More than in any other country, European projects are

"the exclusive responsibility of the state, even when they involve private firms or local authorities. When such projects are financed by European funds, their management becomes centralized. This means that a large proportion of public and private productive investment, as well as infrastructure construction of any size, is undertaken with European support and state approval or not at all. European subsidies and funding, which are fully administered by the state, lie at the root of total political control over investment. Hence, bearing in mind that investments without European backing *ipso facto* lose some of their competitiveness, European backing for modernization and development has considerably increased the political and technical powers of the administration with no counterweight or moderating exerted by civil society or elected bodies." (*Ibid.*: 115)

The weak democratic traditions in the country, the fragility of a civil society depending on state protection, the absence of local or regional institutions corresponding to significant territorial identities and socio-economic coherent spaces, coupled with the extreme disaffection of Portuguese society towards Community affairs are factors that strengthen the state's role as the only 'European' actor, as well as the electoral or party political appropriation of Europe by the central powers.

The viability of the European project seems therefore to continue subject to an inter-state logic. The fact that Community policies – especially regional ones –

remain within the framework of national political and administrative systems, enables Member States, although relatively 'drained' of certain competencies, to reconstruct their centrality. The principle of subsidiarity, for instance, encapsulates a polysemic meaning and a versatility making it easily manipulated by the various actors (the European Commission, the Member States and the subnational actors). Although it might contribute to the reinforcement of subnational levels of government and the emergence of innovative political approaches, in cases such as the Portuguese, the prevailing interpretation is established by the state itself. The national administration defines and reunites the partners considered relevant, imposing the terms under which participation takes place and maintaining its own propositions as binding references.

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